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Letter dated 12 March 2012 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I refer to Security Council resolution 2004 (2011), in which the Council requested me to conduct, before the end of 2011, a strategic review of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in an effort to ensure, together with peacekeeping good practice, that the mission is configured most appropriately to fulfil its mandated tasks.

In accordance with resolution 2004 (2011), and following consultations with Security Council members, countries contributing troops to UNIFIL and to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and the parties, a multidisciplinary team from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations visited UNIFIL to conduct the strategic review from 8 to 18 December 2011. Mr. Julian Harston, a retired Assistant Secretary-General in the United Nations, led the review team as an independent expert. The review team also held meetings with troop-contributing countries and Ambassadors of the permanent members of the Security Council in Beirut, as well as separate meetings with the Lebanese Armed Forces and with the Israel Defense Forces. Mr. Harston conveyed on 24 January 2012 the preliminary findings of the review to members of the Security Council at the expert level, and UNIFIL and UNTSO troop-contributing countries. The Governments of Israel and Lebanon were kept informed of the review process. The Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations approved the report on the UNIFIL strategic review on 2 March 2012.

It is useful to recall the context in which the strategic review was undertaken. More than five years after the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), the parties remain committed to its full implementation and continue to adhere to the cessation of hostilities and to respect the Blue Line. This is due in no small measure to the presence and activities of UNIFIL — an effective, mobile and credible force, capable of meeting its main objectives of deterrence, prevention and deconfliction. The UNIFIL liaison and coordination arrangements, including the tripartite mechanism, have played an essential role in keeping the situation calm. The process of visibly marking the Blue Line has contributed to a decrease in inadvertent violations, and has acted as an important confidence-building measure.

The situation on the ground and at sea in the UNIFIL area of operations has stabilized. But there has been no tangible progress towards a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution as called for in resolution 1701 (2006). UNIFIL does not have the mandate or the tools to tackle the root causes of the conflict, which remain largely unaddressed.

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It is the expectation of the United Nations that the parties will fulfil their obligations with respect to the cessation of hostilities in accordance with the letters from the Secretary-General to the parties, which were brought to the attention of the Security Council on 21 August 2006 (see S/2006/675). As I have noted in my successive reports on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and in my letter dated 12 February 2010 to the President of the Security Council (S/2010/86), it is the responsibility of the parties to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the presence of UNIFIL, which has provided a strong deterrent to the resumption of hostilities and has laid the foundation for building a process that can achieve a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution, as envisaged in resolution 1701 (2006).

The strategic review is timely, not only as a means to reflect on the achievements of UNIFIL and the challenges that it has faced but as an opportunity to capitalize on UNIFIL strengths to further the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and, in so doing, safeguard those achievements. The strategic review looks forward. It is not a review of the UNIFIL mandate, authorized strength or rules of engagement. I note that both parties were united in the opinion that UNIFIL should stay, and that, as far as possible, it should retain its present strength, composition and deployment in its area of operations.

The strategic review identified three strategic priorities for UNIFIL in the implementation of its mandate:

- Establish an integrated, comprehensive approach to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), prioritize United Nations goals, and ensure better integration between UNIFIL, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the United Nations country team.
- Further involve the Government of Lebanon in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), in particular through seeking to increase its involvement, and that of its ministries and security institutions, in southern Lebanon.
- Increase the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces, not only as a prerequisite for the gradual assumption of effective and sustainable security control of the UNIFIL area of operations and Lebanese territorial waters, but also as a key element to support moves towards a permanent ceasefire.

In the light of these priorities, the strategic review made a number of key recommendations, which are summarized below.

Strategic dialogue mechanism

In its resolution 2004 (2011), the Security Council called for an acceleration of the pace of the strategic dialogue. Accordingly, a central focus of the strategic review was on the strategic dialogue process as a means to strengthen not only the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces to assume greater security responsibilities in southern Lebanon and Lebanese territorial waters but also as a means to enable the Lebanese Armed Forces to move towards a permanent ceasefire. The review noted that this entails greater UNIFIL coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and United Nations agencies in Lebanon, as well as the increased involvement of the Government of Lebanon at large.

In seeking to ensure that the strategic dialogue becomes an integrated, mainstream function within UNIFIL, and to help to reorient its objectives, benchmarks and timelines for land and maritime forces, the strategic review recommended political leadership of the process by either the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander or a person designated by him.

The review also recommended the establishment of a coordination mechanism between UNIFIL, the Lebanese Armed Forces, the Government of Lebanon and international donors to ensure a comprehensive approach and support to the strategic dialogue mechanism. The review recommended exploring with donors, including troop-contributing countries and other Member States, and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon the possibility of creating this coordination mechanism to equip, train (for operational and non-operational activities), and provide assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces in fulfilling tasks mandated under resolution 1701 (2006).

The review also identified the need for UNIFIL to undertake a separate internal study to address the issue of increased UNIFIL involvement in capacity-building for the Lebanese Armed Forces, and in order to examine the feasibility of and the criteria for formalizing bilateral assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces for the sole purpose of implementing tasks mandated under resolution 1701 (2006).

Liaison and coordination

In the light of the tragic and deadly exchange of fire between the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces in August 2010, the review highlighted the need for UNIFIL to engage with both parties to further develop liaison and coordination arrangements for times of crisis, when there are breaches of the cessation of hostilities. Strategic decision-making and guidance, including in the liaison role, and security arrangements with the parties should be strengthened to ensure that there is no escalation in case of an incident.

Building on the efforts of UNIFIL, the review recommended that UNIFIL should focus more on promoting arrangements and pragmatic localized understandings between the parties, which would serve to further stabilize the situation along the Blue Line, remove pretexts and possible points of friction, and prevent future incidents.

As regards the continuing process of visibly marking the Blue Line, the review noted the parties' different understandings of the Blue Line. In the next stage, UNIFIL should tackle areas that are potentially problematic, either by reaching an agreement to go ahead with marking or by reaching an understanding on rules of engagement and/or security arrangements in those areas.

The review assessed that the establishment of an office in Tel Aviv, agreed by the Government of Israel in February 2007, remains of critical importance for UNIFIL, to enhance the current level of liaison and allow for a strategic dialogue with the Israel Defense Forces and other Israeli authorities on UNIFIL-related issues.

Tripartite mechanism

The tripartite mechanism is the primary tool for strategic liaison and coordination between UNIFIL and the parties. It is a credit to the parties that they

have utilized the tripartite mechanism to de-escalate tensions and resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner.

The review recommended that UNIFIL build on its current efforts and activities, and examine the possibility of further strengthening the tripartite mechanism to facilitate practical arrangements on the ground between the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces that would build confidence and defuse tension in potential flashpoints, as appropriate and deemed acceptable by the parties. UNIFIL should explore the idea of establishing additional trilateral subcommittees, like the Blue Line subcommittee, as deemed appropriate and acceptable by the parties. The mission should continue to ensure that the tripartite mechanism is as flexible as possible and able to discuss a wider range of issues at the request of the parties.

Operational activities

The review highlighted the importance of the impact of UNIFIL operational activities in advancing the objectives of resolution 1701 (2006), rather than their number. It called attention to incidents of restriction of the Force's freedom of movement, some of which involved aggressive behaviour, including the taking of United Nations equipment, and cautioned that UNIFIL must be careful not to accept voluntary restrictions on its freedom of movement. The review noted the importance of improving relations with the local population, and in this regard recommended the development of a sustainable, long-term strategy and the reinforcement of the UNIFIL civil affairs capacity, particularly its national staff component. The review also recommended that UNIFIL strengthen its coordination of public outreach activities.

Prior to the commencement of the strategic review, the Office of Military Affairs of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations conducted a military capability study of UNIFIL from 27 November to 7 December 2011. The findings of the military capability study informed the strategic review on the capability, deployment and configuration of UNIFIL land forces, including the UNTSO Observer Group Lebanon, and its maritime forces. The military capability study assessed that the priority effort of UNIFIL could be oriented more efficiently to tasks that contribute directly to mandate implementation by maintaining and enhancing activities conducted in cooperation and coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces, and by focusing UNIFIL independent operational activities along the Blue Line. The military capability study also analysed and assessed, in consultation with UNIFIL, the possibility of troop adjustment within the authorized strength of 15,000 troops, and in response to the prevailing situation on the ground. To this end, from a strictly military point of view, a number of observations were made, with an eye to contributing to a leaner but no less capable Force.

Accordingly, the review recommended that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations work closely with the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander to validate the observations and recommendations of the military capability study and ensure that the Force's capability to implement its mandated tasks is in no way curtailed and is consistent with the strategic priorities described above. The review also recommended that UNIFIL should take greater advantage of the added value of military observers from the UNTSO Observer Group Lebanon, and should utilize them for specific functions under the UNIFIL mandate.

Mission integration and coordination

The review recognized that UNIFIL cannot be isolated from the political nature of resolution 1701 (2006), and that security conditions and the political process are mutually dependent. In addition to recommending that UNIFIL ensure greater synergy between its military and civilian components, and recognizing a particular need to optimize the capacity of the mission's political component, the review recommended the appointment of a civilian Deputy Head of Mission, in parallel to and at the same level as the Deputy Force Commander, in order to strengthen and institutionalize the relationship between the political and the military leadership of UNIFIL. It is noted that given the current staffing configuration of UNIFIL, the recommendation is resource neutral.

The review also recommended the establishment of a formalized consultative process between UNIFIL and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon. This should be conducted with due regard to maintaining autonomy for the missions concerned in areas under their exclusive purview.

Although a wide-ranging evaluation of the United Nations presence in Lebanon was not in the terms of reference of the strategic review, the review identified a need for a formal assessment of the overall United Nations presence in Lebanon, with a view to optimizing the considerable human and material resources in the country and enabling more effective United Nations advocacy and engagement with political and military interlocutors in Lebanon and Israel, particularly in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon